

2020 just keeps on giving, huh guys? First and foremost, I just want to state that I support everyone else's sentiments, and that I truly yearn for a better MAGFest.

Some of you, I've already talked to before. Not so much about the board, but about issues in the office that have caused me emotional damage, and slowly whittled down my will to work for my most beloved organization in the world. As a result of such a difficult, overbearing, and sometimes toxic work environment, it has become incredibly difficult to do my job properly.

Let me be clear – this year has been rough for a myriad of different reasons, but none of which are above having to work under the board and Paul Birtel for me.

My first and primary grievance is a lack of transparency, progress, or resolution on a formal HR complaint filed by all six employees against Paul Birtel. Here's a quick summary from my perspective, but there is more specific documentation and perspective from other employees and volunteers found [here](#).

A few months into PB's employment at MAGFest, I witnessed particularly alarming behavior from him. On a near weekly (and in some cases daily) basis, there was blame-shifting, targeted personal attacks, gaslighting, manipulation, retaliation, and other categories of psychological misconduct coming from PB. I, along with other employees, were targets of this behavior, and it wasn't until a few months after it began happening that the rest of the office staff even first met to discuss it.

My intent is to not be dramatic in this recounting, but it's worth pointedly stating that PB has literally made every single office member cry at various points. Some directly, some shedding tears for others over the situation we were in. PB has been particularly keen on calling out employees' shortcomings in meetings with other employees present, in a non-constructive and particularly attacking way. There was one specific meeting where I was singled out in front of my coworkers and verbally attacked by PB. I felt so terrible and embarrassed about myself, I cried after the meeting ended. If it weren't for the love and support of the rest of the office afterwards, I might have quit then and there.

Of course working at MAGFest, as an employee or a volunteer, is often very emotionally draining. And sometimes that leads to tears, especially when things build up over time. And sometimes that can be okay, and even therapeutic. But the line I draw is when someone directly verbally attacks someone to the point of tears, which should never be tolerated.

Our original strategy was to try and constructively help PB, and do our best to ingratiate him into the MAG fam. It can be tough to join a new team, especially in covid times, and we were incredibly sympathetic to that. We continued to give him the benefit of the doubt, and continued to work in good faith towards a positive relationship. More often than not, our advice (which was often even solicited by PB) went completely ignored. We even met as a group for a night of "gaming and real talk", in an effort to be honest and constructive, in a friendly environment, and

that particular event went extremely poorly. It eventually got to a point that we no longer felt comfortable trying to help him, out of fear of additional retaliation.

And so, after trying desperately to solve the issues within the hands of the office, we realized that wasn't going to happen, and we decided to collect a series of our reports and issues, and formally submitted them to our HR manager. This happened on August 5, and to date, there has been no clear action taken regarding this, no transparency from the board in the process, no perceived progress, and no apology from PB.

Though to his credit, I will say that I believe his overall attitude has improved over the last few months, and any emotional misconduct towards me has mostly dissipated. (I partially attribute that to us simply having much fewer 1-on-1 meetings.) But that doesn't address the overarching issues we have had in the past, and the emotional toll this opaque process has taken on people I care about.

I want everyone to know that under normal circumstances I would *never* share details like this publicly, because I truly believe everyone has a chance for redemption, PB included. And I genuinely apologize to him for adding to the list of people who have now brought these issues to light. Unfortunately, I feel the board has backed us in a corner, and if they're not going to help this situation, the last avenue we can take is full transparency and honesty.

The way the board has managed our formal complaints against PB is one of my primary grievances. I believe that, despite HR properly reporting the issues and accentuating the severity, it seems that because of close personal relationships with PB, there is no notable action being taken with regards to his performance or management style. And if there is, that certainly has not been relayed to the office by the board.

This continues to be a persisting issue with the board. They operate within a private bubble, and seem to be actively against transparency. It often feels like they enable one another's toxic behavior, and seem to justify that behavior as a force for the betterment of MAGFest. And while a lot of their behavior often does not directly affect me, it does directly affect my coworkers and various volunteers, which in turn affects me. Not to mention their actions have placed a significant emotional toll on all of us, and put our mental health at risk.

Here's the thing though. Individually, I LOVE every member of the board. Hell I play games with some of them on a regular basis (shoutouts Tresch, love you bud), and I don't think I've ever had a personally shitty conversation with any of them. They're ultra chill. PB is ultra chill, too. Outside of work, I'd have a beer and play Smash with any of them. And that's what makes this SO HARD! It's hard to say "this person [that is my friend] is not fit for the position they're in, and they are continually negatively affecting myself, my peers, and my coworkers." That's a shitty thing to say, and probably an even shittier thing to hear. I love those humans dearly, but I just sadly can not endorse them in the positions they are in. I'm not sure if it's due to an active disconnect within the organization, groupthink paranoia, or the persistent echo chamber they're in. Either way, something needs to change.

I put a lot at risk writing this, but I do so because, more than anything, I love this organization and truly feel it's at risk right now. A lot of you know me... you know I don't ever care about any of this kind of drama. I just want to get my work done and make cool (and sometimes shitposty) things for the community I love so much. I fully intend to continue working to the best of my ability to keep putting on awesome events, and helping the volunteers make the best experience for our amazing community. It's just been made seriously difficult over the last 6+ months.

I love you all, and I'm so sorry this all sucks. Please don't hesitate to hit me up for anything. <3

-Dac